

## COMMENTS ON SUPPOSED REPRESENTATIONS OF GIANT BIRD TRACKS AT PIMBA

By NORMAN B. TINDALE, B.Sc., ETHNOLOGIST, SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM.

THE carved representations of tracks of a giant bird reported in the preceding paper by Messrs. Hall, McGowan and Guleksen from Pimba are of particular interest since they open up the distinct possibility that in Australia man may have been a contemporary of giant extinct birds such as *Genyornis newtoni*, and *Pachyornis queenslandiae* in the same way that the early Maori was the hunter and exterminator of the giant Moas of New Zealand. The story of the early New Zealand moa hunters has been carefully pieced together by Duff (1950) and others.

The detailed nature of the bird track marks from Pimba, showing as they do the separate claw and pad impressions of the bird, suggest that the artists were familiar with fresh tracks of the bird and were not merely depicting the footprints of an imaginary bird or the enlarged tracks of an ordinary emu.

The discovery does not stand alone. In Western Victoria a Tjapwurong tradition exists about a giant bird called [‘mihirug ‘parimall] much larger than the ordinary emu, which the Tjapwurong called [‘parimall]. Dawson (1881, p. 92) who was the first to notice the story gives the following account: “The aborigines have a tradition respecting the existence at one time of some very large birds, which were incapable of flight, and resembled emus. They lived long ago when the volcanic hills [of the Western districts of Victoria] were in a state of eruption. The native name for them is ‘meeheernung parrinmall’—‘big emu,’ and they are described, hyperbolically, as so large that their ‘heads were as high as the hills,’ and so formidable that a kick from one of them would kill a man. These birds were much feared on account of their extraordinary courage, strength and speed of foot. When one was seen two of the bravest men of the tribe were ordered to kill it. As they dared not attack it on foot, they provided themselves with a great many spears, and climbed up a tree; and when the bird came to look at them they speared it from above. The last specimen of this extinct bird was seen near the site of Hamilton.”

Basedow (1907, p. 716) referred to the possibility of identifying some rock carvings at Balparana with *Genyornis* tracks but in a second paper (Basedow 1914, p. 200) he seems less definite about the value of his observations; the figure he gives (1914, pl. 1A) certainly is indeterminate and unlike

the clear cut ones from Pimba. Basedow (1914) states that "the traditions of the native embody references to emu-like and other monsters" but gives no particulars.

Other records of extinct animals supposed to be associated with the aborigines exist. Basedow (1914) refers to tracks identified as those of the great marsupial *Diprotodon* at Yunta. Hale and Tindale (1929, p. 30) recorded and figured a carving, made by aboriginals, of the head of an extinct crocodile-like animal at Panaramittee, and refer to legends of mythical animals, called Kaddikra, identified as crocodile-like and similar to descriptions of other mythical creatures of giant size called Kadimakara which were first noted in aboriginal legend by Gregory (1902). Mountford (1929) gave a detailed analysis of data on this discovery.

Taken as a whole the series of rock carvings reported by Messrs. Hall, McGowan and Guleksen agree with ones already reported from other places in South Australia and also with drawings made by present-day aborigines of the Great Western Desert of Australia. Further study of these will be necessary to determine successions of styles. There seems little reason to doubt, however, that the most recent of these carvings are related to contemporary aboriginal work. The giant bird tracks may be older, but on the evidence of the legend related by Dawson may not be very old since some of the volcanic craters of Western Victoria cannot have been extinct for very many centuries, and such realistic story details of a giant bird as are given by Dawson would not be likely to survive an indefinitely large number of generations of verbal transmission.

#### REFERENCES CITED.

- Basedow, H. (1907): *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, Berlin.  
Basedow, H. (1914): *Journ. Roy. Anthropol. Inst. Great Britain*, London 64.  
Dawson, James (1881): *Australian Aborigines*, Melbourne.  
Duff, Roger (1950): *The Moa-Hunter Period of Maori Culture*, Wellington (Bibliography).  
Gregory, J. W. (1902): *The Dead Heart of Australia*.  
Hale, H. M. and Tindale, N. B. (1929): *South Australian Naturalist*, Adelaide, 10 (2).  
Mountford, C. P. (1929): *Trans. Roy. Soc. S. Australia*. Adelaide, 53, pp. 245-248.